DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 144 EA 028 241

TITLE	Keys to a Quality Education. Executive Summary.
INSTITUTION	Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, Salem.; Oregon Association of School Executives.
PUB DATE	1997-01-00
NOTE	19p.; Prepared for The Governor's Quality Education Work Group.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; Educational Assessment; *Educational Change; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation Criteria; Evaluation Methods; Minimum Competencies; Performance; Public Education; State Legislation; *State Standards; *Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS	*Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century 1991

ABSTRACT

Oregon's Education Act for the 21st century sets academic and performance standards for all students statewide. The implementation of statewide standards entails a major change from a time-based to a standards-based educational system, and will require that all students achieve the performance standards for each curricular area. This report to the Governor's Quality Education Task Force explores the implications and realities of implementing educational reform. The report focuses on each of the following areas: academic content standards, performance standards, and opportunity-to-learn standards. It also highlights key factors that affect student learning. To give all students adequate opportunity to learn, the Oregon Association of School Executives School Fund'ng Coalition recommends: (1) smaller class sizes; (2) more training and support for teachers; (3) expansion of instructional hours and days; (4) adequate, up-to-date learning materials and tools; (5) sufficient staffing; (6) additional funding to develop strong educational leadership; and (7) investment in school infrastructure. Discussion is needed to determine a shared vision for public education in Oregon. The report also offers specific recommendations for each of the three types of standards. (LMI)

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KEYS TO A QUALITY EDUCATION

Executive Summary

Prepared by the

Oregon Association of School Executives
School Funding Coalition

for

The Governor's
Quality Education Work Group

January 1997

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Keys to a Quality Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Standards-Based Education

Introduction

A tidal wave of change will soon hit the educational system in Oregon. That change involves the implementation of Oregon's Education Act for the 21st Century, which sets academic and performance standards for all students statewide.

The significance of the change is threefold: First, it represents the implementation of **statewide standards**. Instead of local school boards establishing achievement standards and curricula for students, the state has set uniform requirements and standards for all school districts.

"The goal is not to help only some *or* most *students achieve up to the standards, but to help* all *of them achieve at that level."*

Second, it represents a major **change from a time-based to a standards-based educational system**. Under a time-based system, the quality and level of a student's education was determined by the amount of time that individual had spent in school and a demonstrated level of achievement in the classroom. Under a standards-based system, students must demonstrate that they have achieved specific standards or levels of performance.

Third, standards-based education will require schools to ensure that **all students** -- regardless of innate ability, economic background, family support or previous school experience -- **achieve the performance standards** for each curricular area. The goal is not to help only *some* or *most* students achieve up to the standards, but to help *all* of them achieve at that level.

The recommendations made in each section are not to be taken as elective choices. They are a collection of interrelated variables. Each makes a difference for each other. If we are to have a real effect on student learning and school retooling, the recommendations must be seen as a package.

This report to the Governor's Quality Education Task Force delves into the implications and realities of implementing educational reform. The report is intended to stimulate dialogue between educators and policy makers about the components of a quality education and what it costs to provide it.

Focus On Academic Content, Performance And Opportunity To Learn Standards

"School leaders, teachers, and administrators need training and professional development to acquire new skills and adapt to new expectations."

Report Overview

The report focuses on each of the following areas:

1. **Academic Content Standards** -- the body of knowledge and skills that all students in Oregon are expected to master, under the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century;

2. **Performance Standards** -- the specific levels of achievement that all students are expected to attain, as established by the State Department of Education;

3. **Opportunity to Learn Standards** -- the components that affect a student's ability to learn, and the elements that must be provided for all students to have appropriate opportunities to learn.

Following is a summary discussion on each of these topics.

1. While school districts have already begun putting the new **academic content standards** and curriculum changes into place, they will need adequate resources to implement them fully and successfully. In particular, they will need continuous staff development at the district level and reform of Oregon's teacher training programs to retrain the workforce. Teachers are being asked to teach in new ways, as well as to interact with students, parents, administrators and each other in new ways. They need training and professional development to acquire new skills and methodologies and adapt to new expectations.

Timelines Are Critical

School districts also need reasonable timelines to implement educational reform. They need high quality, continuous support from the Department of Education, Education Service Districts, the Oregon Department of Higher Education and the Oregon Legislature. School districts want to be held accountable to performance standards while still being given the flexibility to implement each part of the Education Act for the 21st Century in the way that best meets their students' needs.

Major Statewide Communication Program Is Needed

2. **Performance standards** have been set for student achievement, teacher performance evaluation and program evaluation. Parents, teachers, students and the general public must understand what these standards are and how and why they are being used, so they can support and participate in the assessment processes.

   In general, a major statewide communication program is needed to explain the reforms that are coming and the revolutionary change from a time-based system to a standards-based system.

   In addition, local school districts need to inform their communities about what is happening in the local schools. The districts will need to step up communication and outreach efforts to involve the public in continuous school improvement.

3. The new standards-based system will require that all students be given the **opportunity to learn** up to standards levels. The key factors affecting opportunity to learn are:

"The state must assure that schools are able to provide all students the opportunity to learn up to the new standards level."

Research Shows Some Factors Are Very Important To Student Learning

- **Class Size** -- the number of students per classroom
- **Quality Teachers** -- well-qualified, properly trained teachers with adequate opportunities for ongoing professional development
- **Time** -- the length of the school day and school year, time spent on task, pre-school and kindergarten programs, alternative learning programs and number of hours in the work day and work week for teachers
- **Learning Material/Tools** -- resources such as textbooks, lab equipment, classroom equipment and supplies, computers and software and other learning materials, all of which must be adequate and up-to-date
- **School Environment and Culture** -- school safety and orderliness, values, attitudes, support and respect for students, and orientation to the whole child
- **Leadership and Governance** -- leadership by superintendents and principals, state and local leaders, school boards, administrators, teachers and staff, employers and employees, and parents and citizen committees in achieving educational reform and providing opportunities to learn
- **Infrastructure/Services** -- the services inside a school, relating to students, transportation, business operations, personnel, data processing, record-keeping, communications and other processes; and the infrastructure for tracking student achievement to help all students achieve to standard

"We are looking at the way schools operate, the way teachers teach, the way students learn and the way performance is measured."

Key Recommendations

While school administrators and educators support the educational reforms being adopted, they are concerned about the need for adequate funding and resources to achieve it. School people recognize and are prepared to shift funding from old system program to new system program. That is a part of real reform. At the same time, when the resources are not adequate, the state must step up and make new resources available. The reforms constitute a wholesale change in the way schools operate, the way teachers teach, the way students learn and the way performance is measured.

Consequently, educational reform requires funding and resources for retraining teachers, retooling facilities, adding and upgrading technology, acquiring additional space and materials for teaching and providing individualized attention.

To give all students adequate opportunity to learn, the Oregon Association of School Executives School Funding Coalition recommends:

Fewer Than 20 Students In A Class

1. **Smaller class sizes.** Research indicates that classes with fewer than 20 students per teacher produce achievement gains; above 30 students per teacher results in achievement slow-downs. Smaller classes give teachers more time with each student, reduce behavioral problems and contribute to a calmer, more orderly environment.

2. **More training and support for teachers.** Oregon needs a larger base of qualified teachers, especially for math, science and

Increase The Base Of Qualified Teachers

technology, as well as second language and special education. Financial incentives, tuition waivers or rebates can help encourage more people to pursue a career in education. At the same time, funding for staff development is critically important to help current teachers adjust to the demands, needs and challenges of a standards-based system oriented to helping all students reach specific levels of achievement.

Increase Time For Instruction, Preparation, Evaluation, Communication, And Professional Development

3. **Expansion of instructional hours and days.** Funding is needed for a longer school day, summer school/extended year instruction, full-day kindergarten, preschool for students in need and the provision of evening, Saturday and tutorial classes for special instruction. Contracts with teachers, administrators and support staff should span 12 months. Teaching time should be based on a work design that allows adequate time for instruction as well as preparation and planning, evaluation, parent communication, professional development and other teacher needs and responsibilities.

Provide Adequate Technology And Learning Resources

4. **Adequate, up-to date learning materials and tools, from textbooks to computers.** Sufficient, stable funding is needed to allow every public school classroom in Oregon to network and link to the Internet. The recommendations call for one computer for every teacher and one for every two students; plus current textbooks and software. Other recommendations call for a statewide library system, telephone access in every classroom, distance learning network and clerical support for teachers.

Provide Safe, Orderly Schools

5. **Sufficient staffing to assure safe, orderly schools that provide an environment conducive to learning.** Schools must be safe from hazards as well as any threat of violence. Funding should be provided to support substance abuse prevention education at all grade levels. Schools should offer co-curricular and after-school activities that appeal to a cross-section of students and provide an alternative for latch-key children.

"Professional Development helps good instructional leaders who innovate as well as implement reform."

6. **Additional funding to foster and develop strong educational leadership.** Funding is needed for staff development of school board members and administrators so schools can attain higher levels of student achievement. Teachers need professional development in order to be good instructional leaders and to innovate as well as implement new teaching tools. In addition, the management-to-staff in school districts should equal that of high-performing organizations in the private sector.

Don't Forget Business, Operations and Support Services

7. **Investment in school infrastructure.** Investment is needed to help all districts receive, report and transfer data, and to maintain sufficient staffing for transportation, maintenance, accounting, budget management, legal services, personnel services, communication, food services, data processing and telecommunications.

Conclusion

"This School Funding Coalition believes the best way to bring Oregonians back together and, at the same time decide the proper level of school funding, is to determine a shared vision for public education in this state."

The debate over school funding in Oregon has become highly emotional and divisive. The task of reaching new, higher standards is even more daunting when we recognize that the public is less inclined to be supportive and to participate with the local efforts that will make the change work. The political climate and popular media foster suspicion, distrust and cynicism about the motives of public educators. This School Funding Coalition believes the best way to bring Oregonians back together and, at the same time, decide the proper level of school funding, is to determine a shared vision for public education in this state. The discussion must include elected officials and other policy makers, school administrators and staff, teachers, parents, students and the general public. If all Oregonians are committed to the vision, they will support the funding necessary to achieve it.

It is our fervent hope that this document will stir productive debate and discussion on what we want of our schools and our children, and will ultimately help light the way toward an exemplary, outstanding educational system for the children of Oregon in the 21st Century.

"If all Oregonians are committed to the vision, they will support the funding necessary to achieve it."

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Keys to a Quality Education

Recommendations

I **Academic Content Standards: What Schools Teach; What Students Learn**

1. That the State Legislature fund comprehensive staff development that would help districts retrain teachers to meet the content requirements of the Oregon Educational Act and fund the necessary retooling of facilities to provide appropriate learning environments for a 21st century education

2. That the State Legislature concentrate on funding elements of the Act according to scheduled state phase-in, giving districts flexibility to implement each element in the way that best meets their needs, to be later audited by the ODE as part of the standards process

3. That the Oregon business community reassess and strengthen its contribution to educational reform and its role in the school-to-work agenda. Oregon businesses were instrumental in demanding reform and now must make a meaningful effort to help fund it.

II **Performance Standards: How Well Schools Teach; How Well Students Learn**

1. The state will launch a major statewide communication program to help the general public understand the transition from the time-based system to the standards-based system.

2. The state will fund local communication efforts so that local districts can inform local communities and include them in school improvement efforts.

3. Training of teachers and other school staff will be provided to develop the skills needed in each district, building and classroom to implement the performance standards.

4. The state will provide adequate funding of state assessment so that the necessary uniform student achievement data is available to sustain research and program development at the local level.

III Opportunity to Learn Standards: Ways to Help Assure Learning

A. Class Size

1. The state will provide sufficient staff at the elementary school level to maintain these average class sizes:

Kindergarten:	Fewer than 20 students per class
Grades 1-2:	Fewer than 20 students per class
Grades 3-5/6:	Fewer than 26 students per class.

2. At the middle and high school level, provide a student-to-professional staff ratio sufficient to maintain average class sizes below 30.

3. For the 50 percent of children who will need additional assistance to meet the Oregon Performance Standards, provide sufficient staffing to maintain class sizes of 15-17.

4. For Alternative Learning Centers, where students require a personalized education plan, provide enough teachers to maintain class sizes of 10 to 15

B. Quality Teachers

1. Create financial incentives for people to pursue a career in education, particularly in areas of special need (for example, low-interest loans or reimbursements for teachers to extend their higher education to a fifth year or masters degree).

2. Provide tuition or rebates for people who become teachers and teach for a certain number of years in the fields of science, math, second language and technology for a certain number of years.

3. Reinstate or reinvest in college of education programs that were historically excellent (e.g., the University of Oregon Resident Master Teaching Program, and the Beginning Teacher Mentor Program at Western Oregon State College.

4. Invest $80 million (four percent of the General Fund budget for K-12) per year in staff development. Pre- and in-service training should lead to mastery of course content and techniques to teach it meaningfully, with particular attention to the material in the content standards. Staff development should also include strategies for reaching diverse student populations and students with different learning styles.

5. Invest in regional Educational Service District's capacity to deliver in-service, particularly in content areas that are "new" or targeted areas.

6. Encourage industries that benefit from a highly educated worker pool to share their employee development resources with local school districts.

7. Provide adequate funding for retraining teachers to use and teach about new technologies.

8. Support and promote integration of state and county ancillary services in the schools such as day care, health clinics, counseling, etc.

C. Time

For classroom instruction:

1. Provide funding for summer school/extended year.

2. Fund evening school for grades 7 through 12; Saturday school; and tutorial sessions before and after school.

3. Provide funding for a longer school day, to allow for more instructional time and more course registration options.

4. Provide funding to extend students' on-task time (the amount of time they actually spend on learning and completing assignments). Schools should emphasize more important curricula by assigning

more class time for it. They should also provide students with time to do general academic work on the campus.

5. Provide funding for full-day kindergarten.

6. Fund pre-school for students in need (Headstart-type programs).

7. Eliminate the hours-per-year requirement; it is not consistent with a standards-based system.

For teachers:

8. Use 12-month contracts with teachers, administrators and support staff.

9. Create a work design for teachers (using the 12-month model) that allows adequate time for:

   - Meeting requirements for higher performance
   - Time with students
   - Study leaves/sabbaticals
   - Curriculum/instruction planning
   - Design of individual student plans
   - Organizational development
   - Professional development
   - School improvement planning
   - Assessment and evaluation
   - Parent communication
   - Professional/technical experience
   - Vacations
   - Collaboration

D. Learning Materials/Tools

1. Provide adequate state funding to purchase and install the necessary infrastructure for every public school classroom in Oregon to network and tie into the Internet. The Oregon Public Education Network (OPEN) includes both Internet and intranet networks that connect schools and educational service districts (ESDs). At present, every ESD in the state is either connected to OPEN or in the process of becoming so.

2. Enhance the statewide distance learning network and help more schools access and use Ed-Net.

3. Provide adequate funding to provide one computer for every teacher and one for every two students, with continuous upgrades, and a family lending "library" of computers and software used by students.

4. Assure adequate money per pupil to purchase current textbooks and software. In addition, provide $20 per student for other equipment and consumables needed for learning in the post-reform era.

5. Create a statewide library system, to connect schools throughout the state and allow them to share books and materials.

6. Provide telephone access in every classroom for teachers and staff.

7. Assure adequate clerical support to help teachers carry out the paperwork and processes associated with individualized student teaching and educational reform.

E. School Environment and Culture

1. All schools should be earthquake-safe, radon- and asbestos-free and all plumbing should be lead-free.

2. The state Common Curriculum Goals should support community service education.

3. Sufficient administrative and paraprofessional staff should be assured to maintain a safe, orderly environment.

4. All schools will have emergency procedures that involve the entire community with suggestions and outlines provided by the Department of Education and/or Emergency Services.

5. Fund comprehensive co-curricular activities that appeal to a broad range of student interests and provide after-school activities for the growing number of "latch-key" children in Oregon.

6. Legislation will be reviewed to eliminate unnecessary and costly fines for maintenance violations unless there is obvious negligence or refusal to correct on the part of the school.

7. Substance abuse prevention education and comprehensive counseling services will be funded at all grade levels.

F. Leadership and Governance

1. Provide adequate funds for sufficient administration to meet the leadership and management responsibilities of reform: a management-to-staff ratio equal to private sector high-performance organizations.

2. Require increased leadership from the Oregon Department of Education, especially in researching and evaluating the restructuring efforts that are occurring.

3. Increase support for OSBA and COSA to allow for staff development of school board members and administrators, so the goals of increased student achievement can be identified, pursued and achieved.

4. The legislature should fund a means of receiving feedback from the public and employers on how well the schools are educating new members of the workforce, and how cooperation between the schools, business community and general public can be improved.

5. Reinstitute funding for the Oregon Professional Development Center and the Teacher Mentor Program, both of which have been discontinued in recent years for lack of funding. These programs help teachers develop instructional leadership and innovate as well as implement new teaching methods.

G. Infrastructure/Services

1. Provide funds to help all districts receive, report and transfer data in a uniform manner.

2. Provide legal services or advice equitably among school districts, regardless of the district's size, location or ability to pay.

3. Require sufficient management and supervisory personnel with appropriate qualifications to assure staff are held accountable for performance at a level comparable to new high standards for students.

Maintain sufficient levels of staffing to provide for transportation, maintenance, accounting, budget management, legal services, communication, personnel services, data processing, food services and telecommunications.

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